

YOUR VALUES  
YOUR PREFERENCES  
YOUR CHOICE

Allina Health 

# Considering Your Options for Long-term (Chronic) Low Back Pain

*Self-care, Spinal Manipulation, Physical Therapy, Acupuncture, Medicine, Injection, Pain Psychology, Pain Rehabilitation, Surgery*



# Understanding Low Back Pain

## Low Back Pain

Low back pain is common. This pain may interfere with your everyday activities, walking, physical activity, leisure and work.

If you have low back pain, you may have tried many treatment options. The options available to you for your current back pain will depend on your needs. These options include:

- self-care
- chiropractic
- physical therapy
- acupuncture
- medicine
- injection
- pain psychology
- pain rehabilitation
- surgery.

Together, you and your health care provider will decide what options are safe for you and decide how to best treat your low back pain.

This decision will be based on the benefits and risks of each option and your values and preferences. You can change your mind at any time. Talk with your health care provider if you have any questions or concerns.

**Check with your insurance provider about coverage for any of the treatment options discussed in this book.**

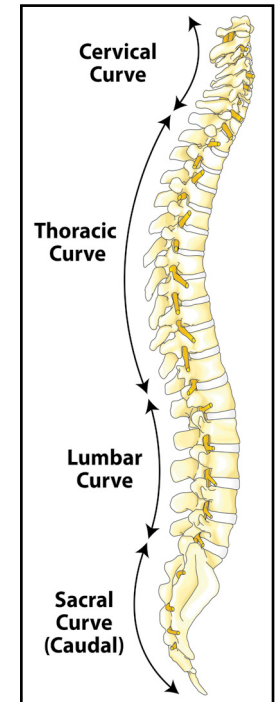
## Causes

Your back is composed of the spine (vertebrae), discs, spinal cord, nerves, ligaments and muscles. A back injury, spine disorder or disease may affect one or more of these parts and can cause pain. It is common to have back pain without an injury or spine disorder.

The cause of low back pain cannot be determined with certainty. This is true even if you know the event that caused pain such as a fall or car accident.

Back pain is produced when the nerves in the low back, along with the spinal cord and brain, sense danger. Pain alerts you that something is wrong. This can be caused by many things such as stress, or lack of exercise or movement.

Low back pain often results from many causes.



© Allina Health System

**Labeled parts of your spinal column.**

# Understanding Low Back Pain (continued)

## Tests

Your health care provider will give you an exam to check for conditions related to long-term (chronic) low back pain.

They will talk with you about what tests they think you should have. This will depend on your exam and health history.

You may have tests such as blood and lab tests, X-rays, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and electromyogram (EMG) studies.

## Recovery

Long-term low back pain may never fully go away. The goal is to find treatments that let you manage your pain so you can be active every day.

Your recovery may be faster if you stay active and do as many of your everyday activities as you can such as walk, work or shop.

Spending too much time lying down or sitting in one position can cause muscle cramps or soreness. It can also affect your mental health. Follow your health care provider's directions so the pain does not get worse.

# Treatment Options

## Self-care

Self-care is an important way to manage your back pain. There are options you can do on your own. Your goal is to return to your normal activities as soon as possible.

Exercise is the most important self-care method you can do to help manage your low back pain. Exercise will help you feel better faster than other methods of self-care.

Other types of self-care include:

- using heat or warm pack
- using a ice or cold pack
- using medicines
- using breathing and relaxation techniques
- getting a therapeutic massage
- managing stress
- resuming your every-day-activities such as going to work
- resuming exercises such as walking and stretching
- practicing yoga
- getting enough sleep
- quitting tobacco use.

## Spinal Manipulation

Spinal manipulation can be done by a chiropractor or doctor of osteopathic medicine. Osteopathic medicine treats the whole body – not just what aches or hurts.

The doctor will use gentle hands-on adjustments to detect and treat pain. These adjustments may include stretching or applying gentle pressure and resistance in the area of pain. This may help lower pain and improve your movement.

Your doctor may:

- teach you lifestyle changes to improve your posture and movement (lifting, reaching, getting in and out of bed)
- teach you home exercises to increase your flexibility and improve the movement of your joints
- recommend other therapies to help your muscles, joints and nerves work properly and lower pain.

**The treatment options on pages 4 through 7 can be used with self-care.**

# Treatment Options (continued)

## Physical Therapy

Physical therapy uses different types of treatments that can help you feel better and move easier. It almost always includes exercises you will need to do after therapy is done.

The most common types of physical therapy are:

- **Traditional physical therapy:** you will use exercise, self-care and therapy. This can help decrease pain, improve your ability to move and manage symptoms of back pain.
- **Spine strengthening therapy:** you will use special equipment to strengthen the muscles around your spine. This can help improve your ability to move and manage symptoms of pain.
- **Pool therapy:** you will learn gentle exercises from a therapist in the pool. This can help to decrease your pain, improve your ability to move and manage symptoms of back pain.

## Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a form of traditional Chinese medicine. It can help your body heal itself and reduce pain. It is done by a licensed acupuncturist.

The acupuncturists at Allina Health are certified by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine and licensed by the Minnesota Board of Medical Practice.

Your acupuncturist will place fine, sterile needles through your skin into specific points in your body. The needles will stay in for about 15 to 30 minutes.

It is recommended you have 6 visits with your acupuncturist when you start treatment. Your first visit may vary from 60 to 90 minutes. Follow-up appointments are about 30 to 60 minutes.

Talk with your acupuncturist about other options they use to help treat low back pain.

# Treatment Options (continued)

## Medicine

There are many over-the-counter and prescription medicines that can relieve pain. The most common are listed on this page.

It is important to talk with your health care provider about what other medicines, alcohol and recreational drugs you take. Together, you and your health care provider will decide which medicine is right for you.

## Analgesic medicines

Analgesic medicines relieve pain. They include:

- over-the-counter medicines such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®).
  - Do not take more than 3,000 milligrams (mg) in 24 hours, unless your doctor says you can take more.
  - Do not take more than 6 pills in 24 hours.
- prescription medicines such as codeine, oxycodone (Oxycontin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), tramadol (Ultram®) and morphine. These are known as opioids.

**Warning: opioids are addictive.** Never take more pills than are prescribed or for longer than you are supposed to. Never share your medicine with anyone else. It is important you take your medicine as directed. Opioids have serious side effects that can limit your activities and cause new health concerns.

## Anti-inflammatories

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are used to relieve swelling, inflammation, stiffness, joint pain and muscle pain. You should take NSAIDs with food to lower your risk of an upset stomach.

Over-the-counter examples include ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) and naproxen (Aleve®). Prescription medicines include prednisone and methylprednisolone (Medrol®).

- For Advil® and Motrin®, do not take more than 2 to 3 tablets 3 times day. Long-term use of ibuprofen may cause kidney issues in the future.
- For Aleve®, take once every 12 hours. Do not take for more than 10 days.

## Muscle relaxants

Muscle relaxants help decrease muscle tension and spasms. Examples include cyclobenzaprine (Flexeril®), methocarbamol (Robaxin®) and tizanidine (Zanaflex®). You will need a prescription.

## Nerve pain medicines

Nerve pain medicines are used to treat pain in your nerves. Examples of these include pregabalin (Lyrica®) and gabapentin (Neurontin®). You may need a prescription for some nerve pain medicines.

## Topical medicines

Topical medicines are pain medicines that are applied right on your skin. Examples of these include xylocaine (Lidocaine®) and diclofenac (Voltaren®). You may need a prescription for some topical medicines.

# Treatment Options (continued)

## Injection

An injection of a medicine can provide pain relief for days, weeks or months. Injections can be repeated after 1 month, but no more 3 times a year if needed.

The most common spine injections are:

- **epidural:** This injection helps relieve pain by reducing swelling and inflammation using a steroid.
- **nerve block:** This nerve block injection goes into your spinal canal, spinal joints and surrounding nerves.
- **trigger point:** This is an injection into sore muscles to help relieve sore muscle pain.

## Pain Psychology

Pain psychology teaches you how to reduce back pain by making healthy lifestyle changes. A pain psychologist is an expert health care provider who will coach you on what you can do to get better.

In general, you will learn:

- how to understand back pain and what you can do to get better faster
- effective coping strategies to reduce pain and remain active
- how to keep motivated for exercise, even when it hurts
- how to reduce or eliminate the need for pain medicines.

## Pain Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation therapies and classes will help you regain strength, movement, endurance and help you return to normal activities. Options include:

- aerobic exercise in the warm water pool and on land
- meditation, tai chi and yoga
- ways to cope with pain and other problems such as insomnia, stress, anxiety and depression
- how to not use opioid pain medicines.

These therapies may be offered in group or individual settings.

## Surgery

Surgery may be an option if no other treatments have controlled your pain. It may be months after surgery before you are fully healed.

Surgery is not guaranteed to work. Options may include:

- **laminectomy or decompression:** This surgery is done to remove a piece of bone from the back of one or more vertebrae to release pressure around the spinal cord or nerve root.
- **discectomy:** This surgery is done to remove the bulging (herniated) part of the disc that is pressing on a nerve.
- **lumbar spine fusion:** This surgery is done to stabilize the spine by fusing or joining 2 or more vertebrae.

# Comparing the Benefits and Risks

Treatment works better if you use more than one method. One or more of these options may apply to you.

	Self-care	Spinal Manipulation	Physical Therapy
<b>Benefits</b> — <i>How long before I start to feel better?</i> — <i>How does it help relieve back pain?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ You may be able to start treatment faster.</li> <li>■ There are different options from which you can choose.</li> <li>■ Most options are free or low in cost.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ It may help your spine to move with less pain.</li> <li>■ It may help increase communication between your brain, muscles and joints.</li> <li>■ It may help with your posture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ There are different options from which you can choose.</li> <li>■ You will have a tailored plan to fit your needs.</li> <li>■ It may help with your posture.</li> </ul>
<b>What is most important to you?</b>			
<b>Risks</b> — <i>What are the general risks?</i> — <i>Are there any side effects?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ You may cause injury or increase pain if you are doing an activity wrong or without guidance.</li> <li>■ Check with your insurance provider if your self-care treatment is covered.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ It may cause short-term increased pain and soreness after your appointment.</li> <li>■ Insurance may pay for a limited number of sessions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ It may cause short-term increased pain and soreness.</li> <li>■ Insurance may pay for a limited number of sessions.</li> </ul>
<b>What is most important to you?</b>			



# Comparing the Benefits and Risks (continued)

Treatment works better if you use more than one method. One or more of these options may apply to you.

	Acupuncture	Medicine	Injection
<b>Benefits</b> — <i>How long before I start to feel better?</i> — <i>How does it help relieve back pain?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ You may start to feel better soon after.</li> <li>■ It may help reduce stress in your body.</li> <li>■ It may help relax your mind and body.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ You may start to feel better soon after.</li> <li>■ You may need a prescription.</li> <li>■ Over-the-counter medicines are available at most grocery stores and pharmacies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ You may start to feel better soon after.</li> <li>■ You will need a referral from your doctor.</li> <li>■ It can help find out where the pain is coming from.</li> </ul>
<b>What is most important to you?</b>			
<b>Risks</b> — <i>What are the general risks?</i> — <i>Are there any side effects?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Side effects may include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— increase in pain</li> <li>— bleeding or bruising</li> <li>— short-term dizziness or upset stomach (nausea)</li> <li>— infection. (This is rare).</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Insurance may pay for a limited number of sessions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Side effects may include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— allergic reaction</li> <li>— drowsiness</li> <li>— upset stomach (nausea) or constipation</li> <li>— throwing up (vomiting)</li> <li>— <b>possible addiction.</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Insurance may not pay for a full prescription.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Side effects may include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— bleeding</li> <li>— feeling jittery</li> <li>— infection</li> <li>— increased blood glucose.</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Insurance may pay for a limited number of injections.</li> </ul>
<b>What is most important to you?</b>			

# Comparing the Benefits and Risks (continued)

Treatment works better if you use more than one method. One or more of these options may apply to you.

	Pain Psychology	Pain Rehabilitation	Surgery
<b>Benefits</b> — <i>How long before I start to feel better?</i> — <i>How does it help relieve back pain?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ It may take a few days before you start to notice pain relief.</li> <li>■ You will learn different ways to control or relieve pain.</li> <li>■ You will learn ways to manage depression, anxiety or insomnia.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ It may take a few days before you start to notice pain relief.</li> <li>■ You can try different classes or therapies depending on your needs.</li> <li>■ You will learn different ways to control or relieve pain.</li> <li>■ You will learn how to return to normal activities such as going to work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ There are different options from which you can choose.</li> <li>■ It may be the best option for you if other treatments have not helped.</li> <li>■ It can improve your spine's stability.</li> </ul>
<b>What is most important to you?</b>			
<b>Risks</b> — <i>What are the general risks?</i> — <i>Are there any side effects?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ There is no physical activity to control or relieve pain.</li> <li>■ You may have to schedule many appointments for continued pain relief.</li> <li>■ Insurance may pay for a limited number of sessions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Some side effects may include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— bleeding and infection</li> <li>— reaction to anesthesia</li> <li>— soreness</li> <li>— damaged nervous system.</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Insurance may not pay for the surgery in full.</li> </ul>	
<b>What is most important to you?</b>			

# My Preferences

Questions	My Thoughts
As you think about the possible risks, what are your fears or concerns?	
As you think about your options, what are your hopes or goals?	
What matters to you most?	
Which of these options do you feel fit best with your treatment goals?	
Is there anything that may get in the way of you doing this?	

## My Decision at This Time

- self-care    spinal manipulation    physical therapy    acupuncture    medicine  
 injection    pain psychology    pain rehabilitation    surgery    undecided

# Next Steps

## Questions for Your Health Care Provider

1. Are all these treatment options safe for me?
2. How rare or common are the risks for the treatment(s) I prefer?
3. How likely am I to benefit from the treatment(s) I prefer?
4. When should I consider starting one or more of these treatment options?
5. If I decide to start any of these treatments, what Allina Health location(s) offer these services?
6. Are there treatment options I should not do at the same time?
7. When and how will I know if the treatment is helping me?
8. What locations offer integrative health services such as chiropractor, physical therapy and acupuncture?
9. Where do I go for pain rehabilitation or pain psychology?
10. How likely am I to improve or recover if I do not use these treatment options?
11. What is the next step for me?

12. Other questions and notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Next Steps (continued)

## Questions for Your Insurance Provider

It is important for you to understand your health care benefits before you begin treatment.

Call your insurance provider and find out exactly what is and isn't covered under your plan, and how much you have to pay yourself. Look for the telephone number on your membership card.

1. Will this treatment(s) be covered for my medical condition?
2. Are there specific requirements or criteria I must meet to receive coverage?
3. How long is this treatment covered?
4. Which health care providers are in my network?
5. Does my health care provider need to monitor how well this treatment works for me to continue receiving coverage?
6. How much will I need to pay for each treatment?
7. Other questions: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Allina Health complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, gender identity or sex.

Allina Health does not exclude people or treat them differently because of race, color, national origin, age, disability, gender identity or sex.

English: ATTENTION: If you speak English, language assistance services, free of charge, are available to you. Call 1-877-506-4595.

Spanish: ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1-877-506-4595.

Hmong: LUS CEEV: Yog tias koj hais lus Hmoob, cov kev pab txog lus, muaj kev pab dawb rau koj. Hu rau 1-877-506-4595.



[allinahealth.org](http://allinahealth.org)